



## A Guide to Spices and Herbs

Spices and herbs add a negligible amount of calories to your food but lots of flavor. And they can help you reduce salt and fat in your recipes. Some spices even boast health benefits because they're good sources of antioxidants. Spices come from a variety of tropical plant and tree parts, such as seeds, fruits, roots, buds, stems and bark. They're usually available in dried forms. Herbs are the leaves and stems of plants, and are available fresh or dried.

Most herbs have subtle flavor, while spices often have stronger flavor. Don't let that stop you from experimenting — just use herbs and spices sparingly at first so that you don't accidentally overpower a dish.

### **Cumin**

Cumin is made from the dried seeds of a plant in the parsley family. Its flavor is earthy and nutty. Cumin is sold as seeds or as a powder. Cumin seeds can be toasted in a dry, nonstick skillet to enhance their flavor. Cumin is commonly used in Indian curries, as well as to season chickpeas, couscous, vegetable dishes and condiments, including raita, a yogurt-based Indian dish. It is also used in Latin American dishes, including as a rub for grilled meats, poultry and seafood.

### **Paprika**

Paprika is made from ground sweet red peppers. Paprika's flavor may be mild and sweet or hot, depending on the variety. It's traditionally used in goulash, but you also can add paprika to potatoes, cheese sauces, tomato sauces, baked fish or chicken, soups, and salad dressings.

### **Saffron**

Saffron is made from a purple-flowered crocus. Saffron generally comes in a powder form or as saffron threads. To use saffron threads, crush and then soak them in hot liquid for about 15 minutes before adding to your dish. Or add them to a dish early in the cooking process. You can remove saffron threads from a dish before serving, but they are edible. Saffron lends a golden color to foods, such as paella, a traditional Spanish dish. You can also use saffron in soups, seafood, poultry, pasta and rice dishes, or even in baked goods, such as bread, rolls and cookies.

### **Turmeric**

Turmeric is made from a root related to ginger. Its flavor is sharp and woody. Turmeric is frequently used in South Asian cuisines. It pairs well with potatoes, lentils, cauliflower and rice. Turmeric lends a yellow hue to dishes

### **Basil**

Basil, which belongs to the mint family, has a pungent, slightly sweet aroma. There are many kinds of basil, each with its own flavor and intensity, so experiment to see which you enjoy using. Basil is commonly used to season Italian tomato-based dishes, sauces and rubs. Basil pairs well with garlic and olives. Basil is widely used in Thai cuisine. Basil is also used to season meats, fish, pasta, stuffing, soups and vegetables. To release more flavor and aroma, crush dried basil, either by rubbing with your fingers or using a mortar and pestle. Fresh basil freezes well. Simply wash and dry well, then seal in plastic freezer bags.

### **Dill**

Dill is a member of the parsley family. The feathery leaves of dill have a pungent, tangy taste. Dried dill leaves are known as dill weed. Dried dill has less flavor than fresh dill, and it can lose even more flavor during cooking, so add it at the end of cooking. In contrast, the bitter flavor of the flat seeds of dill is enhanced by heating. Dill is used in dips, such as low-fat yogurt-based dips, or vegetable toppings. Dill is also used to season fish, chicken, eggs, potatoes, soup, pasta and a variety of vegetables. Dill freezes well. Simply wash and dry well, then seal in plastic freezer bags.

### **Oregano**

Oregano is related to marjoram, but has a stronger, more peppery flavor. Oregano is typically used in its dry form. To release more flavor, crush dried oregano, either by rubbing with your fingers or using a mortar and pestle. Oregano is used in Italian rubs and sauces — especially pizza sauces. It's also used to season fish, beef, lamb, pasta, poultry-based salads, vegetable salads, seafood salads, and a variety of vegetables.

## **Rosemary**

Rosemary is a member of the mint family and boasts needle-shaped leaves like those of an evergreen. Rosemary's strong piney lemon flavor can be overpowering, so use it sparingly. Rosemary is used in Italian rubs and sauces. Rosemary is also used to season roasted vegetables, lamb, milk- or cream-based soups, stuffing, and herbed vinegars. Savory herbs like rosemary can make a surprise appearance in some desserts, such as pound cake, or even in some fruit dishes. Rosemary freezes well. Simply wash and dry well, then seal in plastic freezer bags.

*Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/multimedia/spices/sls-20076032?s=1>*

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